

ACROSS THE BOARD
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Uncomfortable truths about international terrorism

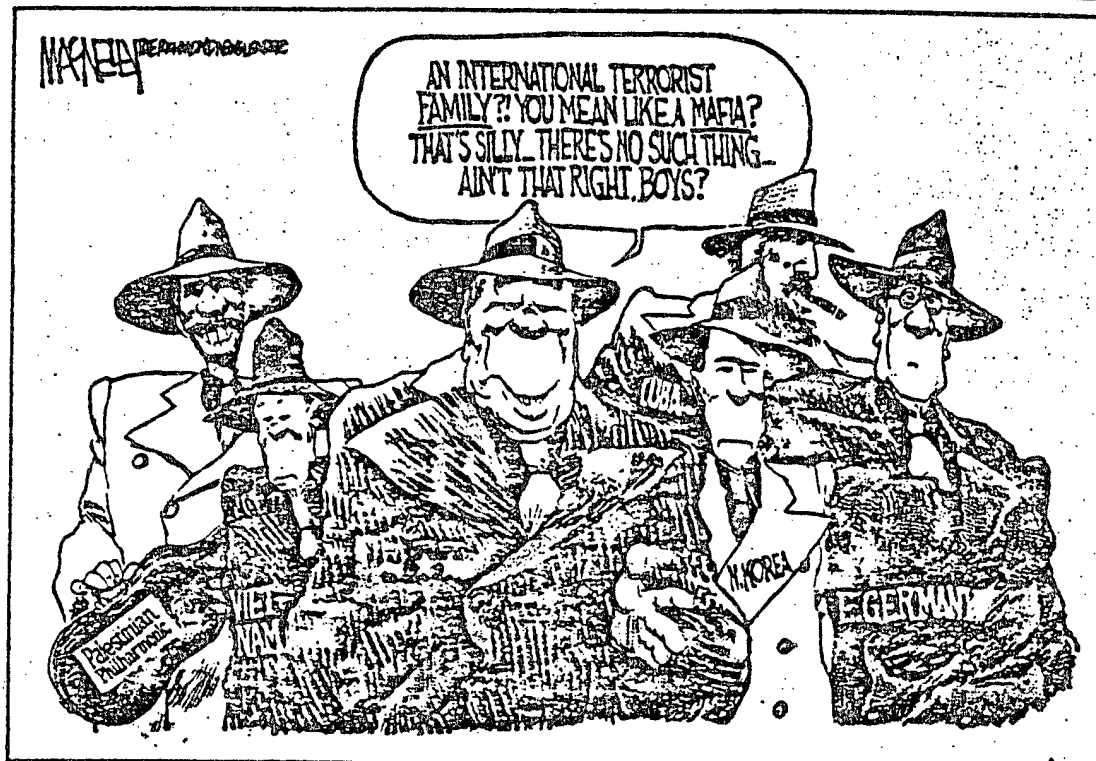
by Paul Wilkinson

There are only two real surprises about the fierce and confused debate that has raged since the Reagan Administration, in its first week in office,

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bluntly accused the Soviets of complicity in terrorism around the world, and the State Department released a dossier to prove Soviet and Cuban involvement in terrorism in Central America. The first is that some usually well-informed people expressed genuine surprise at these "revelations." The second is that a CIA analysis, either through incompetence and naiveté or for more devious political reasons, sought to deny the link. One had become aware that, since Vietnam and Watergate, the CIA had become dangerously rundown and inadequate as the intelligence arm of the leading Western power; but

most people did not expect it to start operating as an agency of disinformation! The CIA seems also to be suffering from a bad bout of amnesia, for one of its own research studies on international terrorism, published in April, 1976, stated: "... after a period of hesitancy, the Soviets began channeling funds, weapons, and other assistance to fedayeen groups through a number of intermediaries in 1969. All indications are that they continue to do so today. Similarly, they have continued their long-standing program (the more innocuous aspects of which are publicly associated with Moscow's Patrice Lu-



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mumba University) of bringing young revolutionaries from all parts of the Third World to the Soviet Union for training and indoctrination. And . . . some of these individuals have subsequently cropped up on the transnational terrorist scene. . . . There is also a considerable body of circumstantial evidence linking Moscow to various terrorist formations in Western Europe. . . .

The same 1976 CIA report goes on to emphasize that much of the work of channeling aid to terrorist movements is done by intermediaries and proxies such as the Warsaw Pact countries, Cuba, Libya and the PLO, "who, if exposed, can be plausibly represented as having acted on their own initiative." The study concluded that although "the true dimensions of Soviet involvement remain extremely difficult to ascertain . . . their efforts to gain some handle on extremist activity have, together with their pursuit of less congruent objectives, done more to aggravate than to contain the current rash of transnational terrorist activity."

This cautious assessment did no more than endorse the conclusions of the small, but fast-growing, Western community of academics, security analysts, and investigative journalists specializing in the study of terrorist phenomena in the mid-Seventies. But over the last few years we have had more and more material brought to light which confirms that Soviet leaders, operating through the machinery of the International Department of the Secretariat of the Soviet Communist party, and the KGB, have been up to their necks in direct support for terrorist activities, pumping vital training, cash and weapons, and valuable propaganda and diplomatic support to selected "national liberation movements" (such as the PLO, the Omani Liberation Front,

the Polisario, the Armenian Secret Army, and SWAPO) on an opportunistic basis, with a view to using them as instruments of proxy war to further Soviet interests abroad.

One valuable source of evidence about the precise nature of Soviet help has come from interviews with captured terrorists. For example, David Shieler of *The New York Times* has published a very full account of his conversation with Adnan Jaber, commander of a PLO terrorist squad that killed six Jewish worshipers in a Sabbath ambush at Hebron in May 1978. The two-hour interview was arranged at the request of *The Times* and conducted in the presence of an Israeli Army public relations officer and with no guards or interrogators present. The Soviets must, of course, be aware that it is impossible to keep their terrorist training activities secret, even if they particularly wanted to. For the organizations they assist, such as the PLO, openly admit its extent: indeed they boast about it, no doubt in the belief that it adds to their movement's status and credibility and the impression of power and invincibility they wish to create. Jaber claimed that he was selected for special training in the Soviet Union, following preliminary courses in Syria and Lebanon. He was sent to a camp at Skhodnya, about 20 miles from Moscow, where he received training in the use of weapons, how to command a group of about 30 guerrillas, military tactics, political ideology and propaganda techniques. Jaber said he and his fellow trainees were not allowed to have any contact with Soviet citizens other than their instructors.

Further details of the terrorist training camps within the USSR were revealed by Herbert Krosney in a September 1979 article in *New York* magazine and in his TV documentary on the PLO shown by the

PBS and CBC the following week. Drawing on intelligence reports and interviews with PLO officials, Krosney was able to provide a very interesting description of the six-month specialist training course made available to selected members of major PLO factions at the Soviet foreign-military academy at Sanprobal near Simferapol on the Black Sea. Under the innocent title "engineering," selected "national liberation" movement personnel are taught: regular and electric detonators; production of incendiary devices; preparation of an electrical charge using a detonator; fuse types; blowing up vehicles and ammunition dumps; and many other technical skills of terrorism. Krosney's sources estimate that, up until 1979, roughly 1,000 PLO operatives had been sent to training camps either in the Soviet Union or in other Soviet bloc countries. This program was stepped up after 1977-78, when the Soviets decided to make greater use of the PLO to counteract the Sadat peace initiative with Israel and the Camp David process. The PLO Representative to Moscow, Muhammad ash-Shader, confirmed the continuing importance attached by the Soviet regime and the PLO to this program when he said, in February 1981: "Hundreds of Palestinian officers holding the rank of brigade commander have already been accredited by Soviet military academies, and members of the PLO use arms of Soviet and East European manufacture. . . ." It is important to stress that such support given by the Soviets to the PLO has a far wider significance in the furtherance of international terrorism, because the PLO is the most important conduit for weapons, funds and expertise to other terrorist movements, including some of the main groups active in Western Europe. For example, selected IRA members have been

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sent to Palestinian camps for basic training since the early 1970s, and since 1976 approximately 10 IRA members have been arriving in Southern Lebanon for training every month. Many IRA weapons have also been obtained through the PLO: in 1972 an arms shipment from Fatah to the IRA was detained at Antwerp; in November 1977 five tons of weapons, including mortars, rocket launchers, explosives, and automatic weapons en route to the IRA from the PLO were intercepted in Belgium, where the weapons were found to have been hidden in electrical transformers en route from Cyprus to the Irish Republic.

The PLO is not the only Soviet ally acting as a conduit for aid to other terrorist movements. Cuba, Libya, Southern Yemen, Vietnam, and North Korea all play a significant role in training and in provision of weapons. Shipler's informant, Jaber, claimed that Vietnamese training was particularly highly valued by the terrorist groups, because it was so up-to-date. Southern Yemen is an important training base, with an estimated 700 Cubans, 1,500 Soviets and over 100 East Germans engaged in training terrorists from numerous groups in three camps at Mukalla, Hauf, and Al-Gheida. Libya has also been an important center for training and weapons supply. For example, Thomas McMahon, the IRA man found guilty of the murder of Lord Mountbatten and members of his family, acquired his expertise in constructing remote-control bombs in a camp in Libya, under the direction of Soviet specialists. There is a network of Libyan training camps catering to a wide variety of West European and other terrorist groups. Apart from the Libyan role in helping train and arm the PFLP, and other groups such as the IRA, Qaddafi has recently concentrated efforts on training terrorists to subvert his ad-

versaries in the Arab world, such as Egypt and the Sudan.

Cuba's participation in funneling practical assistance and armed "advisers" to foreign movements is fully documented. Its activities as a Soviet proxy in Africa are well known, and it is clear that the KGB has taken a particularly close interest in the establishment and supervision of Soviet-style terrorist training in Cuba. The State Department's dossier on the tragic situation in El Salvador underlines the importance of Cuba as a Soviet proxy for the subversion of the vulnerable and unstable regimes in Central America. What is less well known is that Cuban "advisers" and support are increasingly being channeled to areas and insurgent groups further afield, such as within the United States' own borders, and in the Middle East. It has been reported that some 400 Cubans have been sent to assist the PLO in Lebanon, and that in return the PLO has promised to help "freedom fighters" in Latin America, Asia and Africa. One fruit of this arrangement has been, presumably, the PLO aid to insurgents in Central America.

The great advantage for the Soviets of this use of proxies for subversion and terrorism is, of course, that they can disclaim any responsibility while in practice reaping the strategic benefits of undermining noncommunist states, increasing the dependency of their client states and movements, and thereby hoping to gain still greater control over them. By helping "national liberation movements" in strategic areas of the Third World, such as the Gulf, the Horn, the Caribbean and Southern Africa, they clearly hope to gain control over key strategic "choke points" where they could sever vital sea-lanes which supply the West, and gain control over key suppliers of strategic natural resources such as oil, "yellowcake" uranium and bauxite.

Prospects of rather different tactical gains may attract them to aiding the often tiny but potentially disruptive terrorist groups active within the NATO democracies' own borders. Except in certain cases—for example, Turkey in 1979–80—the Soviets must know that terrorism in Western countries has little chance of destabilizing the whole political system. On the other hand, it has great prospects of weakening them by disruption and attrition. The Soviets are not unaware that protracted terrorist campaigns in democracies tend to force Western governments to spend more on internal security and to divert their already inadequate conventional forces away from the tasks of external defense, thus weakening NATO in its major task of countering the Soviet and Warsaw Pact buildup. Soviet leaders would not find it easy to refrain from aiding, at least covertly, groups that are such a thorn in the throbbing flesh of their adversary capitalist states. And, the export of political violence constitutes a low-cost, low-risk weapon in the service of Soviet interests. Because it is undeclared, and, to a large extent, clandestine, it can be used without bringing the danger of a major conventional war escalating to nuclear conflict between the superpowers.

Needless to say, the Soviet Union is not prepared to explain its true motives and interests in promoting terrorism and political violence on an opportunistic basis around the world. The USSR does not want its true role revealed because it would destroy tactical advantages, such as surprise—or the opportunity of helping both sides simultaneously (as happened in the Horn of Africa) so that they are bound to be ultimately on the winning side. Where their cover is blown or they officially admit involvement, of course, the last thing the Soviets will do is to attempt to justify it purely in terms of national interest.

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W e must remember that the Soviet Approved For Release 2011/08/17 : CIA-RDP09S00048R000100020076-8 media they control need a convenient ideological framework that both explains and justifies direct and indirect use of violence beyond the borders of the USSR under certain circumstances. Where a particular national liberation movement or revolutionary faction is judged to be on the side of the "progressive forces" of Marxism-Leninism, as led and interpreted by the Soviet vanguard, and hence against the "capitalist-imperialist reactionaries," it can be ideologically legitimated as part of Moscow's mission to further the world revolution's inevitable march to final victory. This is precisely how the Kremlin justified its (ultimately decisive) role in supporting the Vietcong. They use the same terms when they "adopt" movements such as the PLO today. History tells us that in every recent struggle by national liberation movements, terrorism has invariably been adopted by some, if not all, of the movement's factions, as one of their weapons of struggle. Yet the Soviets, of course, angrily disavow the terrorism label for any of the campaigns or actions they support. They claim that, as the leading revolutionary power in the world, they have the duty to aid national liberation movements to the fullest possible extent, and they can even quote UN resolutions on struggles for self-determination to support their claim that these activities are perfectly within the rules of international law. Moreover, the Soviets constantly reiterate their belief that this kind of aid is totally compatible with East-West détente, for they have never regarded the process of negotiating agreements on such matters as arms control, trade and scientific exchanges as precluding their right to continue to wage ideological warfare in support of world communism whenever and wherever they wish.

Hence, we should observe that the great dispute between the West

and the Soviets over "international basic facts. The Soviet Ambassador in London admitted, in a BBC radio interview, in March 1981, that his government is involved in the activities I have described. What is really in dispute is the interpretation of these facts. The Soviets claim that they are engaged only in aiding legitimate national liberation struggles. Many Americans and other Western observers, including this writer, question the credentials of some of the national liberation movements the Soviets are sponsoring, and point out: first, these movements, now and in the past, have carried out barbarous acts of terrorism, deliberately and systematically attacking the innocent; and second, the most influential of these client movements, the PLO, in addition to its own terrorist activities, is heavily engaged in helping to sustain a whole host of other smaller but equally lethal terrorist movements, many of which are mounting their attacks within the Western democracies, or against Western targets in Third World countries.

As many historians of Russia have pointed out, the official attitude of the Soviet regime toward terrorism has always been highly equivocal. On the one hand, Lenin condemned individual terrorism as a waste of valuable revolutionary lives, as a possible provoker of repression that would only inhibit the development of the revolutionary movement among the masses, and as a possible means of turning the people against the revolution. On the other, Lenin and the Bolshevik party eagerly embraced mass terror as a method of extirpating "counter-revolutionary" elements and consolidating their control over the new revolutionary state. And a dictatorship that has used and experienced mass terror on the scale of a Stalin is hardly likely to hesitate at the thought of using terror as a weapon beyond its

Richard Pipes's insight, in "The Roots of Movement" in *International Terrorism: Challenge and Response*, that the Bolsheviks were the beneficiaries of the process of terrorism in Russia that had helped undermine the country's traditional values and institutions, in the prerevolutionary period. Thus, Pipes argues, despite their rhetoric rejecting terrorism, this experience left "an indelible imprint on the minds of the Soviet leadership," and thus they adopted terrorism as part of their repertoire of global strategy because this was "a natural adaptation to foreign policy of methods which had been learned by the Bolsheviks and their allies when they were in the underground fighting the Imperial regime."

Although the Soviet Communist Party's *apparatchiki* have an almost instinctive feeling for the use of terror as a weapon of internal control, I believe there are at least three powerful reasons why they continue to show considerable caution in employing terrorism as a tool of Soviet foreign policy. First, they must be afraid of the weapon's rebounding on their internal system of control. The Soviet Empire is full of disaffected groups and persecuted ethnic and religious minorities who might all too readily emulate terrorism as a means of fighting the Soviet regime, especially if they saw the method working against other East European Communist regimes with a less secure grip on their populations. Richard Pipes may be correct in his claim that the Soviet Union has in reality a lower tolerance for terrorism than the pluralist states of the West. If the omniscience and power of the Soviet state were to be seriously challenged by internal violence, then the whole system of Communist party control could rapidly crumble. This may help to explain the Soviet leaders' paranoid reaction to dissent of any kind, and

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their massive repression against its smallest manifestations. Perhaps it was this kind of consideration that helped persuade them to stop aiding the Red Army Faction terrorists in Germany, and to initiate a limited cooperation between their Warsaw Pact allies and West Germany in tracking down German terrorists who had escaped to Eastern Europe.

Second, the Soviets must be well aware of the dangers inherent in their own lack of control over their protégé foreign terrorist movements. It is true that the Russians can always conceal or disown their connection, but suppose the protégé, using the firepower and expertise acquired from the Soviets, causes a major international conflict that threatens to escalate out of control? If it is difficult for the Soviets to completely subjugate individual Warsaw Pact states to their will, if they become vexed with the idiosyncratic policies of a more distant ally like Qaddafi, just imagine the problems of trying to control a national liberation or terrorist movement sustaining itself on the basic belief that it is a *self-determining* actor, the sole true representative of its "own people." Whatever the realities of dependency in terms of cash and arms, the Soviets must be aware that they are dealing with highly autonomous volatile entities that, with the aid of modern weapons of mass destruction, could cause conflicts endangering the Soviets' interests and national security.

Third, the Soviets are clearly aware that for them to be associated with sponsorship of international terrorism is a definite disadvantage in their attempts to woo sectors of opinion in Western and Third World countries. Terrorism is definitely what T.D. Weldon, in *The Vocabulary of Politics*, once called "a boo! word." The touchy, indeed angry, reaction of the Soviets to the Reagan Administration's charge of Soviet complicity in international terrorism is evi-

dence that the Kremlin realizes that any visible sign of their backing for terrorism may be counterproductive in the longer term by alienating international opinion.

The truth is that, for all their aggressive and exaggerated rhetoric, the Russians have been forced on to the defensive about their role in exporting and sustaining violence and terrorism. Soviet radio supported last year's IRA hunger-strikers, and portrayed Britain as "oppressors," and the Maze prison as "a concentration camp," but tried to emphasize that the Soviets did not endorse the IRA and its "extreme forms of struggle" which, they claim, do not help solve the Irish problem.

If the Reagan Administration really desires to go further than opening up a national and international debate on terrorism, and sincerely wishes to do something to curb this scourge, it has to recognize some uncomfortable home truths about international terrorism. They are:

□ It is a weapon employed by hundreds of extremist groups and movements with myriad different aims, ideologies and grievances: neo-Marxists, Trotskyists, anarchists, nationalists, racists, fascists, neo-Nazis, and even religious cults and sects.

□ Most of these groups have a genuine indigenous base of support, however small, in the country of origin and operations. Thus it is quite foolish to assume that the severing of all their external links with sponsor states and supporting movements abroad, even if this were possible, would end the terrorist campaigns within Western states at the drop of a hat. Of course foreign help is often a significant aid to such groups, but it is far from indispensable. In democratic states the terrorist is able to exploit, and even to thrive on, the very freedoms of association, expression and movement that the totalitarian terrorists are working

to destroy. Thus the burdens and tasks of combating terrorism confronted by countries such as Italy, Spain, France and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland must primarily be borne by their own police forces, intelligence, military, judiciaries, citizens, and social and political institutions. Improved international cooperation and more pressure on the state terror sponsors can of course help by further limiting terrorist firepower and resources or by denying some terrorists sanctuary.

□ Effective pressure on one state sponsor, however powerful, is not going to yield any dramatic results in combating international terrorism, because there are sufficient rogue states in the game—Cuba, Libya, Southern Yemen, North Korea, Vietnam, East Germany, Iran, Syria, Iraq, to name only the best known—to provide alternative channels of support. It is worth recalling that even the United States has in the past lent its powerful resources to terrorist activity when it was believed expedient. I have described in *Terrorism and the Liberal State* how the CIA built up Cuban anti-Castro groups to hit Cuban targets. When U.S. policy changed and the CIA tried to call off these attacks they found that they had created a Caliban which they were quite unable to control. Ironically this has now created an additional headache for the overstretched FBI and the local police forces in those states where numerous factional feuds and terrorist attacks by various Cuban groups have occurred in recent years.

In addition to these facts of life about international terrorism, there is yet another uncomfortable truth that should be brought home to American public opinion. Ever since the current phase of the tragic conflict in Northern Ireland began, in 1969, there has been a sector of American opinion at best equivocal, at worst downright proterror-

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1st. Through cash collected by such organizations as the Irish Northern Aid Committee (NORAI) and through pro-IRA propaganda they have been significantly assisting the Provisional IRA to sustain a murderous campaign of violence and intimidation that has destroyed the human rights of hundreds of Britons. Yet the IRA (together with the so-called Protestant "loyalist" terrorist groups) constitutes one of the major obstacles to peace and reconciliation in Ireland, and is an enemy of parliamentary democracy, north and south of the border in Ireland.

During the IRA hunger-strike campaign in Northern Ireland, President Reagan and his colleagues in the U.S. government behaved with impeccable restraint and responsibility. The President and his advisers were clearly aware of the complexities of the conflict in Ulster and the dangers of any intervention that might aggravate the problems and put more lives at risk. Unfortunately, a large section of the American media, especially on the East Coast, and the American-Irish community, used the opportunity to whip up traditional anti-British prejudices. They played on the widespread ignorance of the

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Basic facts of the Northern Ireland situation, in some cases even neglecting to mention the million Protestant northerners who are adamantly opposed to unification with the Republic and who would wage civil war to resist it. Nor was it made clear to American opinion that what the IRA really wanted in the hunger strike was full political status for prisoners who had been convicted of serious criminal offenses before courts of law almost identical in character to courts

dealing with similar offenses in the Irish Republic. Neither the United States, nor the Irish Republic—or indeed any Western democracy—would subvert its own rule of law by conceding political status to terrorists. It was sheer hypocrisy to demand that the British government give in to the blackmail of the hunger strikers and concede this demand. Mrs. Thatcher and her ministers were right to stand firm. Our American friends should pause to consider that their media and dangerously simplistic responses to IRA propaganda could do more to keep IRA terrorism going than any help from the KGB, the PLO and Colonel Qaddafi.

Let there be no mistake; the only sure way of withholding victory from the terrorists in the long run is through the superior moral strength and will of the democracies acting together. All the best conventions and agreements in the world are useless unless our governments and our fellow citizens show the will, determination and courage to uphold the authority of democratic governments and enforce the rule of law. The democracies' struggle against terrorism is indivisible; it is a battle for the human rights of the innocent.